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ABSTRACT

This manual presents an operational approach for teachers for dealing with classroom conflict. The first section discusses the dynamics of conflict including factors responsible for conflict such as differing value systems, individuals in conflict with authority, peer group disagreement, and turnover of students. The second section discusses managing classroom conflict and includes the topics of prevention, discipline, and mediation. The third section discusses activities for coping with conflict. A bibliography is included. (ABL)

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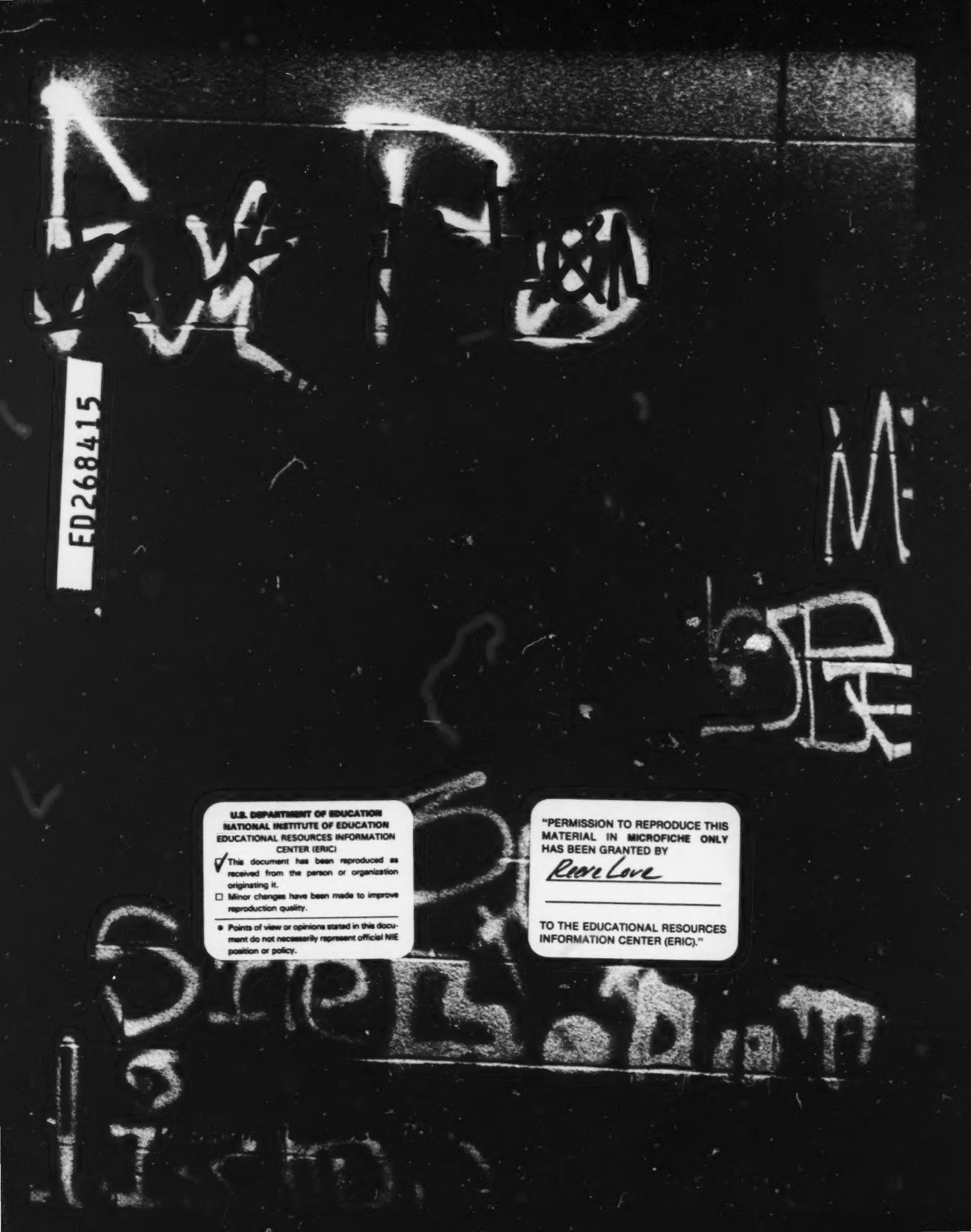

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FRUSTRATION IS . . . .:
A HANDBOOK FOR MANAGING CONFLICT IN THE CLASSROOM

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PROGRAM FOR ASSISTANCE IN EQUITY
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Introduction

Teaching means challenge...and joy...
and lots of other very positive
factors.

But teaching is also frustration.....
And aggravation.....
And sometimes conflict.....

The trick is achieving more of the
joy...and less of the aggravation!

That's what this manual is all about -- managing the conflict, reducing the aggravation, and, hopefully, learning how to put more of that joy back into teaching students -- students of all races and both sexes, as well as students of differing physical and intellectual abilities.

As we all well know, there are many different kinds of conflict that occur in the school environment:

Personal conflicts experienced by individual students....

Conflicts between students.....

Conflicts between groups.....

Conflicts between students and teachers.....

Conflicts experienced by teachers.....

And if these conflicts are not enough to try the patience of Job, we often see additional problems in today's society related to racial and sexual equity...accommodating handicapped students in the classroom...and trying to ensure equity for those students with different national origins and language backgrounds.

If you try to deal with each of these issues as a discrete and separate conflict situation, you'll feel like a juggler balancing a dozen balls. Soon you'll be shaking your head and saying, "How can I ever...?" The fact is, you can't! And unless you're bucking for a choice case of "Teacher Burnout," don't even try.

SO IT'S REALITY TIME!

Dealing with conflict does not mean you constantly must be "on stage" to handle each incident as it occurs. What it does mean is that you can come to understand the dynamics of conflict...the interaction of people...and the factors that often precipitate conflict. THEN, you can begin to separate the people from the conflict and start dealing with the process.

So this manual is very process-oriented. It's not a "quick fix" for all of your problems -- in or out of the classroom. It will present a very operational approach to dealing with the conflict factors that can

get in the way of teaching.....

and learning.....

and enjoying.....

Conflict does, indeed, come from a variety of sources. You, as a teacher, cannot possibly be responsible for all of the conflict-producing factors in students' lives. But you can work to change the learning environment in your classroom so repeated conflict is no longer "standard practice." Because internal tensions related to racial and sexual inequities are so potentially explosive, greater emphasis will be placed on these areas, especially in citing examples. It is critical that teachers become more sensitized to some of these often subtle factors that work against certain students and reduce the effectiveness of teaching.

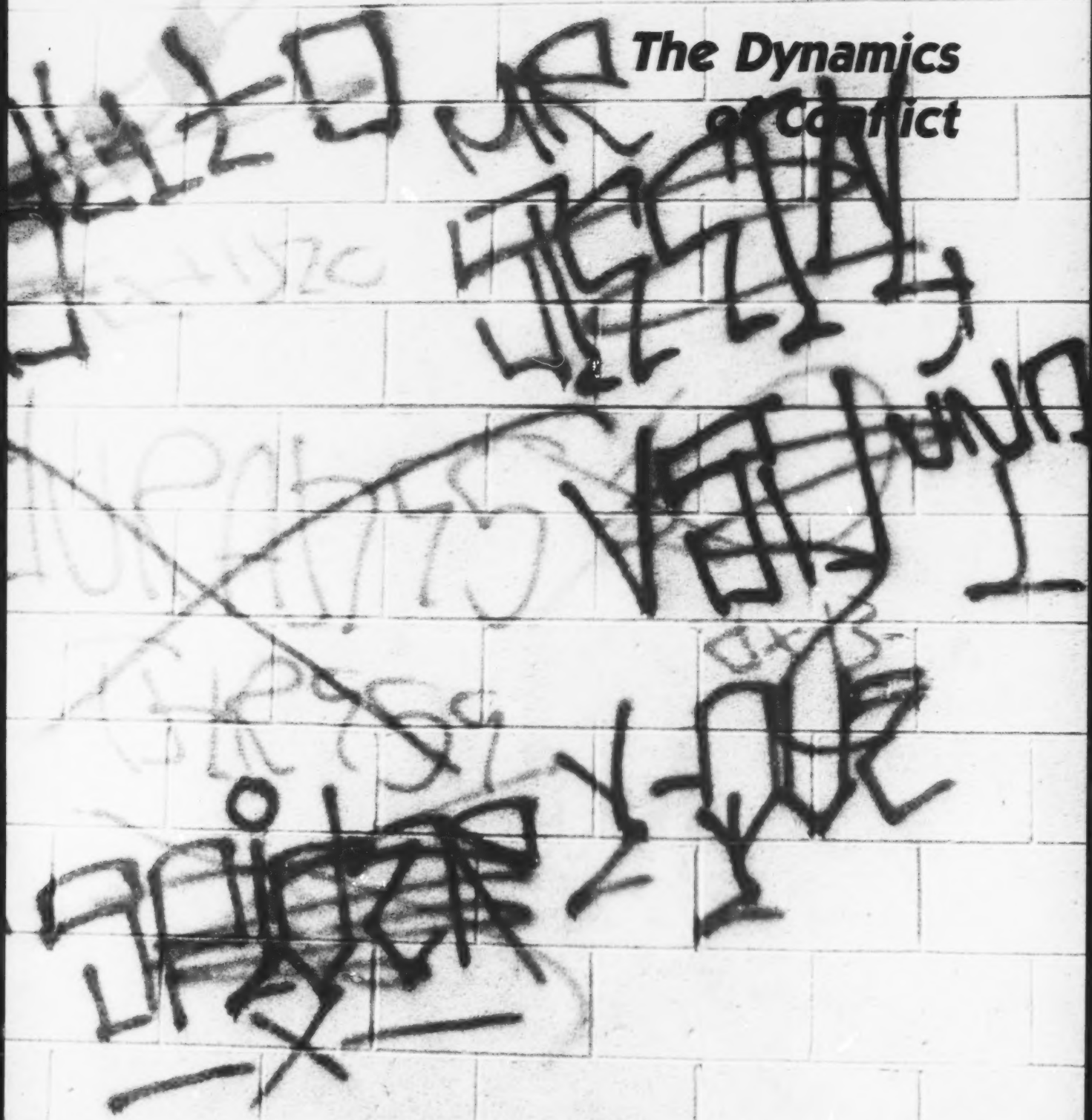
In discussing some of the classroom factors which may contribute to tensions and conflicts among students, the main purpose is to give you as broad a view as possible of conflict dynamics. There is no intention of casting the teacher in the role of the "heavy." In fact, every effort is made to show conflict management as a cooperative project between teachers and students...not a case of "US" against "THEM."

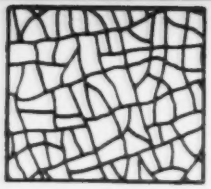
When you can better understand the various factors that go into the production of conflict, you'll have a better handle on modifying behavior -- both students' and yours -- to create a more peaceful learning situation. Therefore, this manual is designed to help you step aside and begin to look at conflict management from less traditional viewpoints...then, you may find it easier to get creative juices flowing to find alternative approaches.

This manual is not intended to be a comprehensive discussion of conflict -- with so many excellent books already on the market, there is little point in re-inventing the wheel. Rather, it is intended to provide you with a practical, workable guide to help you prevent conflict before it occurs...and defuse it more calmly when it does!

SECTION I:

The Dynamics of Conflict





WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Conflict is a situation in which the people involved are frustrated because they feel unable to satisfy some of their needs; each person or group thinks their needs and wants are incompatible with those of the others involved in the conflict.

SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS:

1. Conflict is an inevitable part of many relationships between people.
2. Conflict can have both positive and negative results.
3. The amount or intensity of conflict may increase during times of change.

Conflict is a bit of a "mixed bag." Although people tend to view it very negatively, it can offer some positive results, as well.

POSITIVE RESULTS OF CONFLICT:

1. New approaches to problems may be sought.
2. Previously unresolved problems can be dealt with.
3. Resolving conflicts may help develop more teamwork.

ADD SOME OF YOUR OWN:

4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

NEGATIVE RESULTS OF CONFLICT:

1. Some people may feel alienated from others.
2. The conflict can inflict pain or humiliation.
3. Disruption can occur instead of cooperative teamwork.

ADD SOME OF YOUR OWN:

4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

THE MANY FACES OF CLASSROOM CONFLICT

Conflict in the classroom can be rather insidious...and the causes not always as clear as in an open confrontation between a teacher and students. Many other causes of conflict exist which reflect more subtle dissatisfactions or perceived inequities in the minds of students. When left unresolved, these factors may eventually result in disruptive behavior in the classroom. Rather than viewing these disruptions as the "conflict," teachers should view them as symptomatic and make every effort to determine the underlying causes in order to remediate the situation, if possible.

Disruptive behavior often occurs because of the lack of adequate opportunity for students to -

- Develop strong self-esteem and self-concept
- Express anger or verbalize grievances
- Combat subtle sexual, racial, or other forms of biases
- Hear grievances from both sides, resulting in "de-centering" the conflict
- Create more outlets for creative expression which are not limited by handicapping conditions
- Minimize sexual and racial stereotyping

Regardless of the causes, the conflict and resulting disruptive behavior take several forms.

A. DIFFERENT VALUE SYSTEMS - imposing lifestyles/values on others

A number of differences in value systems exist between students and teachers...as well as between groups of students. Those differences may relate to cultural differences or to social and socio-economic differences as expressed in various sub-cultures of the school population. Conflicts can develop as one person or group tries to impose a lifestyle or value system on others. It may be the teacher who is operating from one set of values and has certain expectation levels of student behavior based on those values. Or certain groups of students, who play a more dominant role in the classroom, may seek conformity in behavior and values from less dominant groups through intimidation or other forms of coercion. **For Example:** A teacher, understandably, may expect assignments to be completed and submitted by certain deadlines. A Native American student, however, with a different cultural sense of time not only may fail to honor those critical deadlines, but may not even understand why the teacher is so upset at this seeming lack of responsibility.

This is not to suggest that teachers abandon all their deadlines for assignments; rather, they might try to understand that such occurrences may stem from differences in concepts..not deliberate flaunting of rules. Likewise, some students may be discouraged (by more dominant students) from entering class elections or other activities because of their gender, cultural or linguistic backgrounds, or handicapping conditions. Teachers need to be more sensitive to these subtle -- and sometimes not so subtle -- efforts of certain students to control the classroom by imposing "preferred" value systems upon others. Creating more equitable opportunities for all students to participate in school activities can do much for lessening tensions and conflicts.

B. INDIVIDUALITY - in conflict with authority

Students are bombarded from all sides -- parents, school, media -- with the idea that they should be individualists and not merely "follow the crowd." Yet in attempting to develop that individuality, they often come in conflict with school authority which regulates group behavior more than it does individual behavior. Many students, therefore, feel that in order to express their individuality, they should not conform to all of the mandates of the school administration...thus setting the stage for ultimate conflict. **For Example:** A student wishing to express that much-touted individuality may openly oppose any rulings that even suggest a school dress code or restrictions on the format of a submitted term paper. If teachers can structure in some flexibility and room for personal choice, along with specific guidelines, it may reduce the necessity for student-teacher confrontation merely to prove a point.

C. PEER GROUPS - in conflict with one another

In spite of the much acclaimed peer pressure to conform, in reality, there are many conflicts between peers. They do not agree in either principle or action on many points. The result in the classroom is that certain students will attempt to resolve any conflicts by intimidation of dissenting peers; at other times, even physical force may be used outside of the classroom. Racial or sexual bias often plays a role in this constant "jockeying" for position, although some other factors may be present. **For Example:** A student, or group of students, may wish to complete an assignment, as directed, but others wishing to disrupt the classroom may try to manipulate the others to follow their lead. If the students who wish to comply with the assignment feel sufficiently dominant within their peer group, they may resist the pressure. However, students who feel more vulnerable because of their backgrounds or abilities may choose to conform to their peers. This kind of pressure may assume both subtle and overt forms. It takes a teacher highly sensitive to the group climate to detect some of this pressure. And it takes even more skill to defuse it while not compromising the position of more vulnerable students.

D. TURNOVER OF STUDENTS - resolution of problems not acceptable to new students

Conflict is an "equal opportunity" component of the classroom. It can affect a variety of people -- teachers and students alike -- in a variety of ways. Many conflicts, however, may be solved to the satisfaction of the current composition of the class, but that composition does not remain static. Old students leave and new ones arrive. The result? The resolution of the previous conflicts may no longer hold, and the changes in the classroom population may mean that many resurfacing conflicts must be dealt with all over again. **For Example:** Through negotiation, the journalism teacher and the students have resolved disputes concerning the content and composition of the student newspaper. Some new arrivals, however, find the newspaper too "provincial" or lacking in "freedom of expression" and openly stir up conflict among the other students. Although some shortcuts may be taken because many of the issues have been discussed before, the teacher, essentially, will have to re-resolve the dispute, or the underlying conflict will be a continuing distraction in the learning process.

Conflict resolution is an ongoing process!

CONFLICT AND DECISION-MAKING

Classroom disruption also occurs when students do not have the opportunity to participate in decision-making that affects their own interests and welfare as it relates to the following:

- Civil liberties
- Right to dissent
- Due process
- Equality
- Privacy
  etc.

Participation in the decision-making process prepares students to be more responsible adults. Yet, in the school situation, imposition of rules and standards without student input seems to be "the nature of the beast." Realistically, the implementation of a completely "democratic" process with students involved at all levels of authority would be a rather cumbersome approach. However, when students are denied access to decision-making, two deficits occur: 1) students do not learn adequately the techniques, as well as the problems, of determining equitable rules to govern a democratic society; and 2) they are denied opportunities to increase their maturity levels through interactive participation.

The continued realization by students that they have little or no voice in this process which affects them so vitally often may feed smoldering resentments...which ultimately can explode into conflict situations. It is, therefore, important that schools search for more opportunities to involve students in decision-making. Selected classroom activities can foster a greater comprehension of the problems and difficult decisions associated with formulating fair and equitable laws/rules, as well as the rather delicate balance between rights and responsibilities. A corollary objective should be the teaching of skills needed for the development of strategies for change (see Section III for sample student activities).

BASES OF POWER

In the classroom, students perceive themselves as operating from a base of "powerlessness." You probably question that strongly when you frequently arrive home "wrung out" from battling confrontations between students and with students. Yet teachers and administrators possess several sources of power which are essentially denied to students.

Let's take a look at some of these types of power and how they relate to the dynamics of conflict.

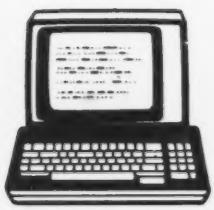
A. ABILITY TO REWARD

Rewards for good behavior and academic achievement or favoritism toward a student whom "everybody likes" can take the form of higher grades, special tasks enjoyed by the student, a little more freedom, or any action that is perceived as favorable to a student. To students who aren't on the receiving end, such rewards are viewed as just another "club" held over their heads by someone in authority. Although your ability to reward may serve as an incentive to excel for some students, it also may have a negative effect, especially for students who are operating under any type of disadvantage -- whether physical, linguistic or intellectual. Likewise, students may be rewarded on the basis of their sex, rather than actual performance. **For Example:** boys are rewarded for their independence and the quality of their assignments; but girls may be rewarded by being called on more by the teacher if they demonstrate their dependence and are complimented for the form and appearance of class assignments, rather than for analytical thinking.

B. ABILITY TO PUNISH

Students can be punished through bad grades, failure to be promoted to the next grade, inability to share in certain group activities, discipline, humiliation, even expulsion. Again, students can be punished for exhibiting behavior not considered by the teacher to be appropriate in terms of the sex, physical condition, or cultural background of the student. For **Example:** girls may be "punished" by lack of positive reinforcement for being too independent or physically handicapped students may be denied the chance to try a new activity because of the teacher's perception of their inability to succeed. Although teachers and administrators believe punishment is meted out as fairly and equitably as possible, students tend to perceive it as a capricious thing over which they often have little control. And sometimes, in reality, punishment may not be as equitable as it should be. As shown by the examples, there are also some more subtle forms of "punishment" doled out by teachers because of stereotyped thinking of which they may not even be aware.

C. EXPERTISE POWER



Teachers and administrators are better educated, have a much broader base of experience, and just generally possess a great deal of expertise that students lack. Although students may respect and even admire that expertise -- up to a point -- they also find it very intimidating. If you don't think expertise power is intimidating, think back to the first time you were instructed in the operation of a computer...and were subject to the "power" of the computer instructor who, obviously, knew a heck of a lot more about operating that technological wonder than you did. It was pretty scary, wasn't it? Why? Because you were no longer in control. Unfortunately, students often feel that same sense of powerlessness when confronted with the expertise power of others.

D. REFERENT POWER

This power may involve real or imagined relationships that students perceive teachers or administrators as having. You are seen as possessing power simply by virtue of having reference to a large number of other people, as well as to the "system." Students don't see themselves as having any significant referent power because they are in a subordinate role. Finding this referent power also intimidating, they try to create their own support systems...but not always in constructive ways.

E. LEGITIMATE POWER (AUTHORITY)

Schools are certainly invested with an authoritative power granted by school boards, parents, and the community in general. Although the power is structured to be administered in accordance with laws, rules, and policies, it is, nevertheless, a rather awesome power in the minds of students. If you can imagine yourself about two feet tall and confronted by a huge giant at least ten feet tall, you get the picture of how students -- consciously or unconsciously -- view the disparity of power allocation between themselves and the school.

WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THIS DISPARITY IN POWER STRUCTURE?

Students simply have fewer resources available to them, so they resort to **coercive power** -- the only major power resource readily accessible.

Why does this coercive power work so effectively in the classroom?

BECAUSE IT IS SUPPORTED BY THE "STUDENT SUB-CULTURE"

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

A. When you call upon Jack, who obviously doesn't have the assignment done, he responds with an obscene gesture easily observable by the class. When you reprimand him, the rest of the class begins laughing and making other vague gestures, until the whole class is in an uproar and completing the lesson is a virtual impossibility.

B. Marianna tells you that her purse has been stolen from her locker and accuses Carmelita of the theft. You question Carmelita but she denies the theft. When you attempt to question other students, their answers are based on their friendship with the two girls. Marianna's friends readily accede that Carmelita probably stole the purse, while friends of Carmelita make unqualified denials of her innocence.

C. A fight breaks out in the gym between Pete and Carlos. Shouts of encouragement to the two fighters can be heard from several groups of students who have aligned themselves with their favorite fighter. When you arrive, the fight suddenly ends, but when you begin questioning observers about what happened, no one even "saw anything." All attempts to get the facts fail as the students collectively have no information to give you. The two students are sent to the principal's office for questioning and possible discipline.

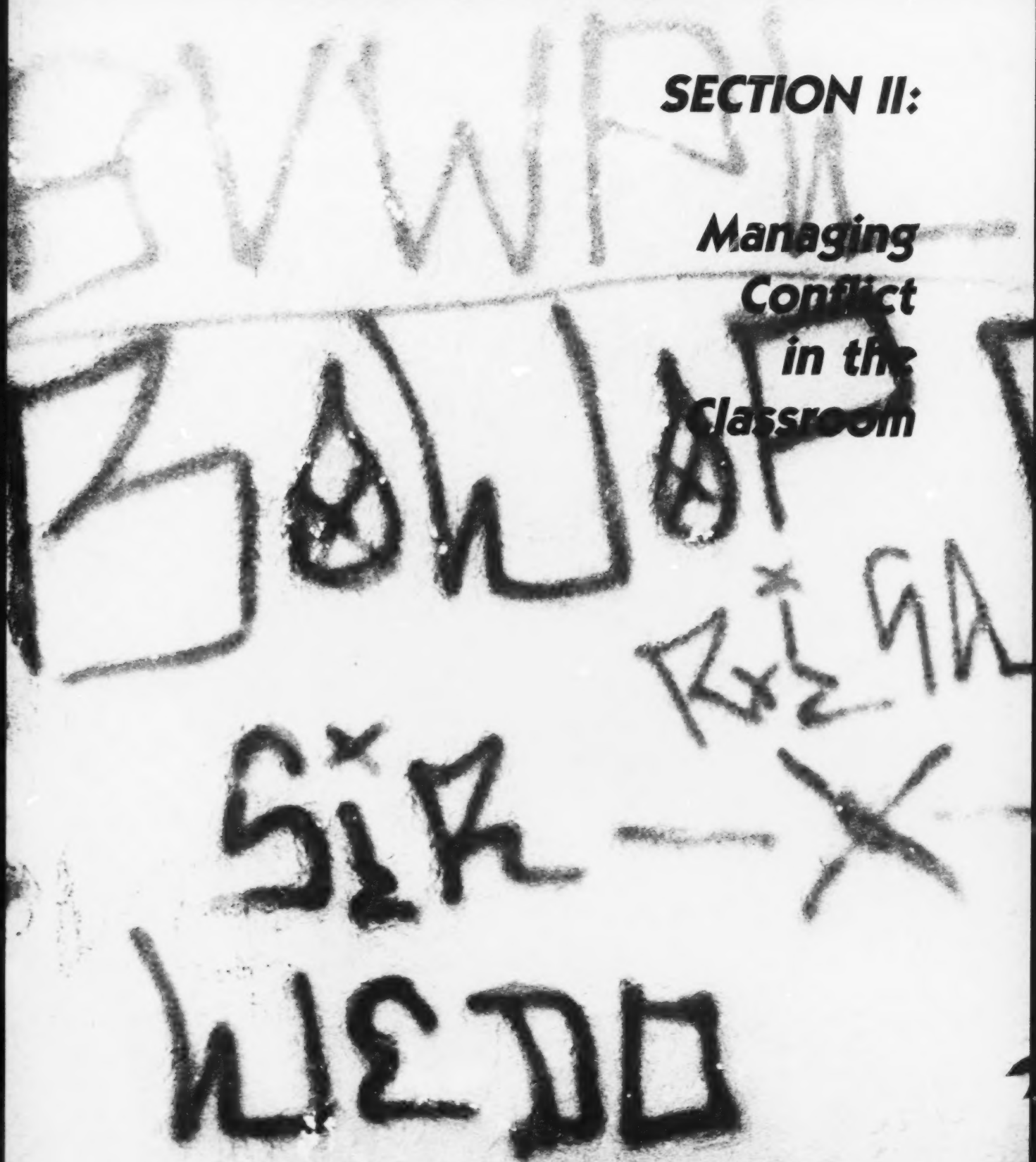
If you're wondering why teachers can't get any more cooperation than evidenced in these three hypothetical school cases...don't!

YOU'RE WITNESSING THE STUDENT SUB-CULTURE IN ACTION...

AND COERCIVE POWER IS THE NAME OF THE GAME!

SECTION II:

Managing Conflict in the Classroom



DISCERNING LEVELS OF CONFLICT

For teachers trying to maintain some semblance of order in a classroom, any kind of conflict is disruptive. However, some conscious effort must be made to look at the different levels of conflict... rather than just lumping all "conflicts" into one category. Some conflicts are fairly superficial and remedies are not too difficult. However, other conflicts have more deep-seated causes and will require greater observation and attention.

Before you, as teachers, can actually manage conflict in your classrooms, you must learn how to "cut through" what appear to be the problems and causes of the conflict. Only by discerning the "real" problems can you understand the causes and take corrective steps.

One way of analyzing conflict is to break it up into more manageable components, as suggested below. Read the examples and observe how the problems are analyzed. Then use the work space to analyze some of the specific problems in your classroom.

VISIBLE PROBLEMS

1. Students consistently disobey rules about smoking on campus
2. The girls in your career education class talk rather than participating
3.
4.
5.

APPARENT CAUSES

1. Students have no respect for rules and choose to be disruptive
2. The girls are more interested in catching the attention of the boys
3.
4.
5.

"REAL" PROBLEMS	"REAL" CAUSES
1. Rules may be inequitable	Students had no input in decisions
2. Girls are not challenged	Sex-biased text and discussion
3.	
4.	
5.	

Listed below are some strategies for coming to grips with the "real" problems and managing them more effectively. Read them with the examples given and imagine how you would apply these strategies.

A. Identify the "real" problems

Example: Students may appear to be fighting the substance of a new ruling when, in reality, they are reacting negatively to the fact that the student body was not involved in the decision-making process or that racism or sexism may have been a part of the problem.

B. Analyze the nature of the conflict

Example: Ask the question "What is the basis for our differences?" rather than "Who is to blame?" Trying to affix blame is a very non-productive approach to conflict and divides instead of bringing a spirit of cooperation.

C. Divide the problem-solving into smaller steps

Example: Instead of trying to arrive at some blanket solution to the problems, look for smaller components of the conflict:

1. On what points are we in agreement?
2. On what points are we in disagreement?
3. Which aspects of the conflict have a higher priority for solution?
4. What is a realistic amount of compromise that can be made on both sides?

D. Create a climate of trust and cooperation

Example: The resolution of any conflict is dependent upon a climate or atmosphere that fosters trust and openness. It is important that teachers take the initiative to create this type of positive climate in which students will feel free to discuss issues. The use of creative questioning that focuses on how people stereotype behavior and the results of biased assumptions can do much to open up channels of communication. Students will be more encouraged to examine the validity and appropriateness of their own and others' assumptions. Moreover, the model that the teacher projects in terms of fairness and equity will help create more mutual trust in the teacher-student relationship.

PREVENTION OF CONFLICTS AND DISRUPTIONS

Admittedly, not all conflicts can be avoided. However, for obvious reasons, preventing them from happening is preferable to having to deal with them after they have occurred.

Preventing conflicts and disruption involves a better understanding of some of the factors that go into the composition of conflict. Realistically, not all of these factors are under the direct control of a teacher or administrator. For example, if you have a student with a highly negative home life, full of frustrations and hostility, you may have an "explosion" just waiting to happen. If you are aware of a student's problems and can provide any counseling or outlets that help deal with those negative feelings, you may be able to keep the classroom from becoming a safety valve to "let off steam." Teachers, however, cannot possibly know all of the mitigating circumstances that affect students, so you should not feel responsible for conditions beyond your control.

Therefore, a teacher must try to focus on the elements within the school and the individual classroom that impinge upon student behavior. Here is where the effort should be made to reduce some of the conflict-producing factors.

Let's examine some of them:

A. LACK OF TENSION-REDUCING OPTIONS

Teachers have several coping mechanisms available to them to help reduce stress and tension. When "things pile up," several positive steps can be taken to ease the strain. Generally speaking, students are denied such options -- in fact, they may be punished for using some of the same coping mechanisms as adults.

1. Open display of anger or frustration not acceptable -

Teachers can become angry at students, but students are considered "hostile" or "rebellious" if they demonstrate any anger toward the teacher or the situation.

2. Withdrawal from situation also not acceptable -

If teachers get over-stressed, they may be able to have an aide take over and leave the classroom for a "tension break." What would happen to a student who has "had it" and attempts to walk away from the situation until the tension subsides? How many kids really have that freedom?

3. Daydreaming likewise not allowed -

To engage in daydreaming not only is tension-releasing but can be an aid to creativity. Even teachers find a few spare moments to "wool gather" and then tune back in again feeling less stressed. But if students are noticeably daydreaming -- for whatever reason -- they are accused of not paying attention.

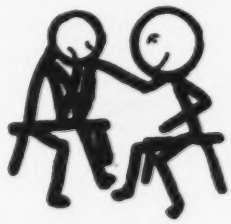
When students are consistently denied some appropriate outlets for tension and stress, the pressures build up until the right catalyst produces an "inappropriate emergency response" to the situation. In other words, a fair share of the conflict and disruption may be a result of the failure of the classroom environment to provide some acceptable outlets for stress.

B. INAPPROPRIATE ATTENTION GIVEN

In some classrooms, the students who receive the bulk of the attention are those who, in essence, ask for it by requesting help with classroom work or overtly showing that they are not functioning well. The students who quietly do their work with some degree of competence may not get as much attention. Students with physical disabilities or different cultural or linguistic backgrounds are sometimes ignored in the classroom unless they are in obvious need of assistance. Likewise, teachers may call on male students more often than on girls or encourage boys while failing to challenge girls or acknowledge their achievements. The ground rules seem to be this: demonstrate incompetence to get attention -- or be a boy! The teacher is inadvertently reinforcing helplessness or non-productivity in some students. Therefore, at the basis of some classroom disruptions are joint student efforts to redistribute that amount of attention given.

C. INADEQUATE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Schools -- particularly secondary schools -- usually have some type of formal grievance or appeal procedure for students facing severe discipline, such as suspension. In the case of complaints involving sex discrimination, students do have an appeal process through Title IX, as well as some other options under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. However, individual classrooms rarely have a procedure for handling minor grievances. With no resolution of the day-by-day grievances and complaints, the situation can escalate, over a period of time, until overt conflict results.



D. MEDIATION SKILLS NOT TAUGHT

Because conflict frequently is dealt with in the classroom by assigning blame and inflicting punishment, students tend to see conflict resolution largely as some win-lose situation. Someone wins...someone loses, usually the student! They are not learning that it is possible to survive frustration...that one can compromise without capitulating. Again, the classroom environment can deteriorate from unresolved problems until it erupts into open conflict with students pitted against students, teachers, or even the system.

ARE YOU PART OF THE PROBLEM...OR THE SOLUTION?

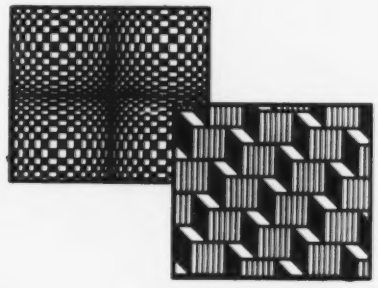
****

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

Many causes of conflict exist...as well as many manifestations of that conflict. It is just not possible, therefore, to have some catalog of solutions that will take care of all situations. As teachers, you all well know that what will work with one student or group will not work with another. However, in the interest of trying to get outside of the conventional approaches to conflict management, we do need to examine some alternative approaches.

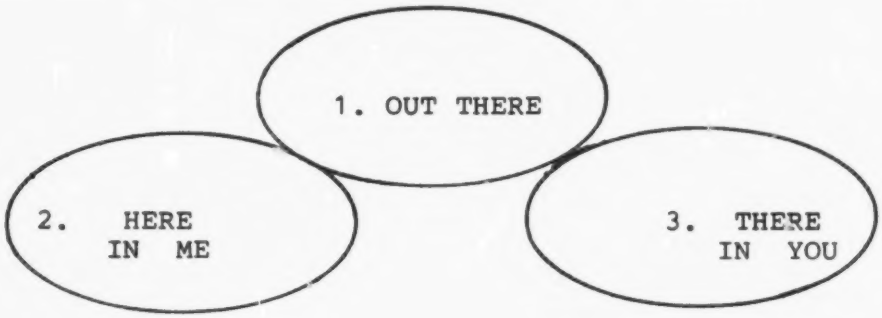
LEARN TO CHECK YOUR PERCEPTIONS

The world is not made up of one homogeneous, objective "reality." Rather, there are many realities according to how different people perceive that world. Even what appear to be easily verifiable data may still be observed differently. Age, culture, experience, sex, and education all influence how we perceive. So, individually, we really have two "realities" -- one inside of our own skins and another outside. When we are dealing with other people, we also have to consider "their reality." But the only way we can know and understand their reality is to check our perceptions, ask questions...and not make inferences about what we "think" they are experiencing.



THREE REALITIES

Each person experiences the three realities from his/her own, uniquely relative point of view.



HOW CAN YOU KNOW WHAT I AM EXPERIENCING?

HOW CAN I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE EXPERIENCING?

WHO CAN TELL YOU WHAT I AM EXPERIENCING?

WHO CAN TELL ME WHAT YOU ARE EXPERIENCING?

"Three Realities" chart adapted from materials by -

Dr. Lynn Weldon
Professor of Human Relations
Adams State College
Alamosa, Colorado

HOW TO USE PERCEPTION CHECKS

When students are responding in ways that disturb you, don't make assumptions or inferences about what they are really "saying" and respond negatively. Check your perceptions -- but with a neutral tone of voice!

"You seem to be upset about this assignment. Am I right?"

or

"You two students seem to be experiencing some differences of opinion over how the display should be set up. Could you explain the points on which you disagree?"

Suggested Lead-Ins for Perception Checks:

1. Is it possible you might be thinking...
2. I get the idea that you are feeling...
3. It seems to me that...
4. I'm wondering if you might be...
5. It appears to me that...
6. It sounds to me that you might be...

Another approach to determining real feelings is to paraphrase another's statements:

"Let me know if I am correct. You are upset with the principal because she moved up the deadline for class schedule changes."

DEAL OPENLY WITH FEELINGS...YOURS AND THEIRS

If you wish to teach students to handle their feelings in more appropriate ways, you will have to start by acknowledging some of your own feelings. Be honest...tell them how you feel, what makes you mad or happy. It may well surprise students to hear your "confession." Like the kindergarten child who, upon seeing her teacher shopping in the grocery store, exclaimed, "Mrs. Garcia, I didn't know that you ate," your students may not know that you "feel."

So reveal your own feelings and encourage students to express their feelings and discuss what causes them to feel angry or frustrated...but assure them they will not be criticized for their statements. You may find some of your students really hurting over what they feel are racial slurs, negative behavior based on sex or language background, or unnecessary limitations placed on handicapped students. By discussing these feelings, students have a constructive outlet. They may also discover that some of their perceptions are incorrect. If some of the discussion involves criticism of you or your classroom, respond non-defensively; this will help encourage students to be more open. When ideas begin to flow, direct the discussion to appropriate and inappropriate ways of handling those feelings.

SOME POINTS TO REMEMBER

* I CAN DISAGREE WITH YOU...but I'm not attacking you and all you stand for.
* I CAN DIFFER WITH YOU...but I'm not rejecting your ideas or YOU as a person.
* I CAN OPPOSE YOU...because I value you as a person and wish to communicate so we can change and grow.

DEVELOP CREATIVE LISTENING SKILLS

We all believe we are fairly good listeners...and sometimes we are. However, good listening may be an on-again, off-again skill. As part of an overall plan to prevent or defuse conflict situations, teachers need to sharpen up their listening skills as a means of really "hearing" what some conflicts are all about. If we can learn to "listen with a third ear" to what students are saying, the real concerns may surface...where they can be handled more effectively and rationally.

Managing conflict takes a many-pronged approach; developing good listening skills is only one aspect. There are many fine resources available that teach listening skills. However, the checklist below relates more specifically to applications of listening to management of conflict in the classroom.

LISTENING CHECKLIST	YES	NO
1. Do you interrupt students before they can finish what they are trying to say?		
2. Do you pre-judge the student or situation before you know all the facts?		
3. Do you "tune out" students just because you feel you've already heard the story?		
4. Does your body language communicate openness and impartiality?		
5. Are you using "perception checks" as you listen?		
6. Do you give students your full attention when they are explaining a problem to you?		
7. Do you try to ask "creative questions" to learn more of the facts?		
8. Are you sensitive to students' non-verbal clues to their emotions and messages?		
9. Do you try to summarize what has been said to verify the accuracy of what you've heard?		

DEVELOP FACILITATIVE QUESTIONING SKILLS

Asking questions is the stock-in-trade of teachers, so you may not feel you need any work in that area. But there *are questions...and there are questions!*

The kind of questioning skills we are talking about here are those which keep communication moving and help you obtain the type of information you need to resolve classroom conflicts or defuse a situation before it turns into a free-for-all.

Let's examine both the wrong and right kind of questions.

BLOCKING QUESTIONS

A "blocking" question is one which can make another person feel uncomfortable...or is a "put-down." It can be a LOADED question which really isn't a question at all, but more of a statement. The often-quoted "When did you stop beating your wife?" definitely falls in the loaded question category.

Another blocking question is the LET'S CHANGE THE SUBJECT type. Asking a question that goes in a totally different direction than what has preceded tells the other person that you're no longer interested in listening to his or her viewpoint on the original subject. If a student is trying to talk to you about some conflicts with another student -- or has a point of disagreement with you -- and you suddenly ask, "When are you going to get that math assignment in?"...you are effectively blocking any further discussion.

PRIVACY-INVADING questions constitute another type of blocking question. When you invade another person's privacy by asking questions that exceed the boundaries of discretion, the result can be that further discussion is "cut off at the pass." For example, if a teacher says to a student: "I really wonder why you are so inattentive in class. Are you on some kind of drugs?" -- it's doubtful that further communication is possible.

CREATIVE QUESTIONS

Creative or facilitative questioning involves the skills of eliciting information that can be exceedingly helpful in understanding a situation, while not closing down all student discussion.

Some questions require only limited answers for the sake of communicating some basic information. EXAMPLE: Questions like "Could we meet after school to talk about this?" or "Would you be willing to discuss this matter with the whole class?" merely require simple answers. However, questions like "Could you give me more details about the argument?" give students an opportunity to elaborate...to give more specifics.

The trick seems to be in knowing when <u>not</u> to ask a question that implies a simple, direct answer when you should encourage more elaboration. EXAMPLE: It's better to ask, "Could you give me your impression of what happened?" instead of "Did you start the argument?" Encourage...don't block ideas!

1. Write two questions that you feel would block communication.

2. Write two questions that would be creative or facilitative in encouraging communication.

LOW-KEY DISCIPLINE

Discipline often connotes punishment or some overt type of action. Unfortunately, this too often takes the form of anger and admonitions pitched several decibels above what the human ear should have to tolerate...in other words, YELLING! And it's no more effective in the classroom than it is when parents yell at their own children in an attempt to keep control of the situation.

Reducing the verbal output and increasing the use of body language can do a lot for maintaining order...and it's easier on both the nervous system and the vocal cords.

Here are a few guidelines:

1. Respond quickly to disruption

Unfortunately, disruptive behavior doesn't go away if you ignore it. Students of all ages are really experts at figuring out how much you will take before exploding. If you have a consistent pattern of making idle threats about what you'll do if they don't behave, the students will play upon this and "set you up." By the time you do reach your limit, you'll be so angry that you can't deal with the situation calmly. So, instead of this game of futility, react immediately to any disruption. If nothing else, it will confuse the students!

2. Use physical proximity

If you stand at the front of the room and attempt verbal intimidation of a student or students in the back, you don't have a ghost of a chance of making an impression. Instead, walk quickly and quietly to the student and confront at close range. If the student is seated, you have the immediate advantage of "towering" over this current "thorn in your side." By moving in closely, you are invading the student's territory, thus putting him/her on the defensive. It's not quite as easy for students to "mouth off" or engage in distracting activities when you're staring at them from a distance of a few inches.

3. Employ definitive eye contact

Face the student directly and rivet your attention on this one recalcitrant person -- don't glance around the room to see what the others are doing. Somehow, it just isn't as much fun for a student to be disruptive when eyeball-to-eyeball with the teacher. When students are collectively disruptive, no amount of threatening of "you students" has much impact...the so-called discipline becomes too impersonal and diffused. But dealing one-on-one with a student can affect not only the behavior of that one student, but also how the rest of the class responds.

4. Show that you mean business

Reinforce what your body language is saying with a tone of voice and facial expressions that mean business. By responding to the disruption immediately, you haven't had time to reach the boiling point, so you can speak more calmly...but forcibly.

DONE EFFECTIVELY, DISCIPLINE CAN BE LOW-KEY, MOMENT-TO-MOMENT!

****

THINKING ABOUT ATTITUDES

1. Write down three factors that could bias you <u>toward</u> a student.

   a._____

   b._____

   c._____

2. Write down three factors that could bias you <u>against</u> a student.

   a._____

   b._____

   c._____

NOW THE "CLINCHER" -

Do any of the above items seem to fall into categories such as appearance, physical capabilities, intellectual abilities, race, sex, linguistic background, age, economic level? What does this tell you about the sources of some of our biases?

3. Think about a time when you handled a particularly difficult situation outside of school. How did you respond? What helped you the most? Can you apply any of this to classroom conflict?

4. Are there certain types of conflict situations with students that seem more difficult for you to handle? Are there experiences in the past that may have influenced this? What can you do to re-evaluate your abilities to deal with such conflict?

5. If you dislike certain students personally, how does this affect your ability to judge their behavior impartially and fairly?

TEACHING STUDENTS MEDIATION SKILLS

In recent years, considerable interest has developed in teaching students how to mediate disputes. As a result, several projects have been set up to teach these skills because of their great potential for decreasing conflict situations in schools. Although most of the projects have been at the high school level, a few projects have been designed at the elementary/middle school level.

Teaching mediation skills ties in very well with law-related education programs, as well as adjuncts to social studies, civics, or even humanities courses. Not only can students learn approaches to handling disputes and negotiation of agreements within their school context, but they also can develop skills that can be invaluable to them in the adult world.

MEDIATION TECHNIQUES

> **Mediation:** "A mediating; intercession or friendly intervention, usually by consent or invitation, for settling differences between persons, nations, etc."
>
> Webster's New World Dictionary

°°°

PROCEDURES FOR MEDIATION

A. SELECTING MEDIATORS

Students may be selected by the recommendations of teachers and other students, as well as by acceptance of students who volunteer as mediators. Many of these students may already have skills as impartial observers and good communicators. However, mediators should be rotated for different dispute resolutions, according to the skills best suited to each dispute, so that a variety of students have the experience of serving as mediators.

It is important to remember that educational mediation training involves not only training in specific skills for mediators, but also teaching participants how to present issues rationally, actively listen to another's viewpoint, and work cooperatively for common goals and creative solutions to problems.

B. INTRODUCTORY MEETING

Before attempting to mediate any dispute, the participants should be put at ease and a climate of openness and trust created.

Ground rules need to be established:

1. No interrupting of other participants
2. No judgmental or derogatory "put-downs"
3. Chance for each disputant to present own story
4. Impartial role of mediator clarified

C. STORY-TELLING SESSION

The mediator should ask the student making the complaint to tell the story of the dispute -- uninterrupted by others. Then the other party or parties receive the same opportunity.

1. Open up dialogue -- what is the problem?
2. When and where did the dispute begin?
3. What are the real issues involved?
4. Were the events caused by accident? On purpose?

Role of the Mediator as Facilitator:

1. Actively listen and paraphrase for accuracy
2. Check out perceptions of others' feelings
3. Encourage ventilation of feelings but foster constructive, rather than negative, criticism
4. Keep session manageable by enforcing ground rules
5. Try to get all issues out on the table
6. Look beyond more obvious causes of conflict for deeper, underlying causes -- the "real" causes
7. Ask creative, not blocking, questions to encourage broader responses
8. Ask participants what kind of resolution each wants -- some conflicts can be settled at this point because of better understanding of issues
9. Reinforce areas of agreement and encourage creative options and solutions to dispute
10. Be a "Reality-Tester" of proposed solutions -- especially helpful if an impasse is reached -- and NEGOTIATE!
11. Make sure that each person "wins" in some way; otherwise, a real reconciliation of feelings will not be reached
12. Draft the final agreement in specific, observable terms

NOTE TO TEACHERS: Some of the materials presented earlier in this book on the nature, sources, and management of conflict could well be used with students as part of the mediation training.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MEDIATION PROCESS

WHAT IS THE DISPUTE?

HOW CAN WE SET UP A RECONCILING CLIMATE?

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE MEDIATOR?

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF RESOLUTION?

THE OUTCOME OF THE RESOLUTION:

A. The quality of the agreement -- is it realistic, practical, and workable in operational terms?

B. The feelings of conflicting parties -- are they unscarred psychologically by outcome? Do they still have their dignity and self-worth as human beings?

C. Nature of relationship between conflicting parties -- are they still angry, hostile, or alienated...or have hurts been healed and understanding and respect developed?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF CONFLICTING PARTIES:

- To treat others with dignity and respect
- To separate people from the problem
- To learn how to "walk in another person's moccasins"
- To present views calmly and non-judgmentally
- To value the differences in others -- whether based on race, sex, religion, age, societal role, etc.
- To understand the perceptual differences and "realities" of others
- To learn how to refrain from imposing one's biases or values on other people

HOW DO YOU "STACK UP" AS A MEDIATOR?

	YES	NO
1. Are you able to remain objective?		
2. Are you aware of your biases and prejudices? Do you control them to avoid pre-judging people or situations?		
3. Do you respond differently to the differences of race, sex, age, linguistic background, or physical or intellectual capabilities between you and the disputants?		

4. What are your strengths as a mediator?

_____

_____

5. What are your weaknesses as a mediator?

_____

_____

If you are interested in learning more about some of the educational mediation training projects mentioned at the beginning of this section on mediation, you might contact the following for more information:

CloseUp/Political Discovery Mediation Project:
(Trains teachers & students in mediation with application to resolving disputes in school settings)

Philip Baas
Madison Park High School
55 New Dudley Street
Roxbury, MA 02119
(617) 445-2440

Susan Chapin
Cathedral High School
74 Union Park
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 542-2325

Ronny Sydney
Brookline High School
115 Greenough Street
Brookline, MA 02146
(617) 734-1111

Rosemary Scott-Sport
J.E. Burke High School
60 Washington Street
Dorchester, MA 02124
(617) 427-0240

Youth Negotiation Project:
(Developed curriculum materials and teacher training to teach young people mediation, negotiation, and other conflict resolution skills)

Albie Davis
Coordinator
Harvard Negotiation Project
Harvard Law School
Pound Hall 500
Cambridge, MA 02141
(617) 495-1684

Elementary/Middle School Approaches:
(Aimed at teaching younger children how to resolve disputes peacefully by increasing their ability to see other people's points of view)

Professor Arlene Gallagher
Elms College
Springfield Street
Chicopee, MA 01013
(413) 598-8351

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF...?

This is a mental exercise that any number can play, including both teachers and students. Its purpose is to free up the creative processes to help look at other options and creative approaches to teaching...especially as they relate to causes of classroom conflict.

Here are some some sample questions to ask yourself...Then try adding some of your own, or have students develop their own list:

___ you asked the most hostile/disruptive students to help you set up grievance procedures for day-to-day problems?

___ you found a place for a "psychological relief room" where students could go to "simmer down" or "recharge"?

___ you organized a Student Fair in which every student could make a contribution by way of labor, art, crafts, oral history, cultural exhibits, native dances, handicapped sports events, demonstrations, or other performances?

___ you told a funny story on yourself and laughed?

___ you evaluated your sex-stereotyped views of students?

___ you set up a Feedback/Suggestion Box in your room and encouraged students to contribute ideas?

___ you made a point to observe whether you call on or encourage boys more than girls?

___ you developed a code with students so they could let you know when tensions were getting too high?

___ you periodically let a student teach the class while you became one of the students?

___ you made a special point to encourage students with physical or linguistic problems to participate more in class...and complimented their efforts?

___ you let students draw up contracts with you regarding class assignments or classroom behavior standards?

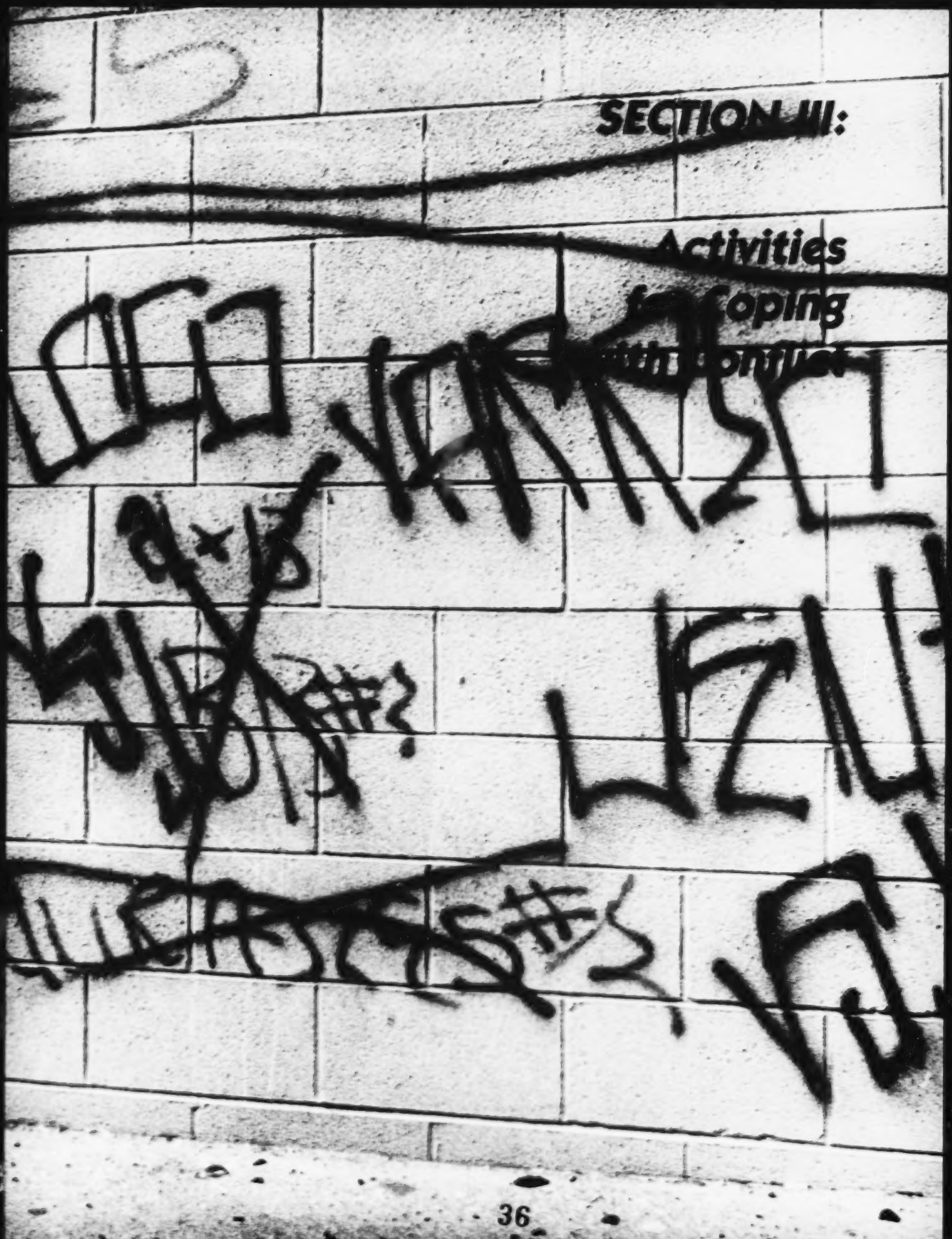
___ you had someone periodically videotape your teaching so you could evaluate how fairly you dealt with students?

___ you shared some of your feelings with students?

___ you role-played classroom conflicts with a student playing teacher and you representing one of the disputants?

___ you asked students to grade you on how fairly you discipline or handle disputes?

___ you positively reinforced each student with "warm fuzzies"?



SECTION III:

Activities for Coping with Conflict

THE FIRST ANNUAL GRIPE-IN

Introduction: Students, like many other people, probably enjoy doing a certain amount of griping about their situations. This activity, conducted in a somewhat light mood, still focuses on giving students an opportunity to gripe, yet points out how they can establish some priorities in their concerns.

Objectives: To enumerate various concerns about rules

To distinguish between trivial concerns and more important ones

To determine if concerns involve racial or sexual stereotyping and bias

To develop strategies for implementing change

Grade Level: 9-12

Materials: Handouts A-1; A-2

Procedures:

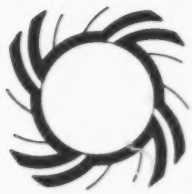
1. Distribute Handout A-1 to students.
2. Have them work individually on listing their gripes.
3. When students are finished, break class up into small groups.
4. Have each group select the five top gripes or problems based on group consensus.
5. Select one and devise a strategy for changing the rule or situation.
6. Have students re-convene as a class and have each group report on its problem and the proposed action or strategy.
7. Have students consider the following discussion questions:
   A. How many of the gripes are all-school policies? How many are selective rules by teachers?
   B. Do you think it is easier to change all-school policies than rules of individual teachers in the classroom? Why?
   C. Are some of the gripes based on racial or sexual stereotyping? Discuss constructive ways of combating these attitudes.
8. Distribute Handout A-2 and have each group evaluate its strategies in terms of the criteria sheet. Discuss the overall effectiveness of each strategy.

THE FIRST ANNUAL GRIPE-IN

Students, unite! This is your chance to gripe about all of those rules and regs -- as well as other situations -- that have been bugging you. They can be rules that apply to everyone (Universal Aggravation) or only apply to certain classes or situations (Selective Annoyance). Remember, nothing is too trite or insignificant to be included. But you must have at least ten gripes, or you're automatically disqualified from the Honorary Gripers' Club.

No more waiting for the privacy of the restrooms to air your gripes. The Class Gripe-In is now in session.

GRIPE	ALL-SCHOOL POLICY	SELECTIVE RULE
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		



Handout A-2

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

Introduction: There are many kinds of policies, rules, and laws in effect. Some of them are practical, necessary, and just. But others are unfair, not necessary, unenforceable, and in some instances downright laughable. Some of the laughable laws no doubt had some logical reason for their existence, but that reason has long since been forgotten. For example, did you know that it was illegal in Michigan for a person to hitch a crocodile to a fire hydrant or that in Seattle goldfish could not ride in buses unless they stayed very quiet?

Requiring written tests for Blacks in order for them to be qualified to vote -- while not requiring them for whites -- or not allowing women to vote prior to the adoption of the 19th Amendment are examples of laws that were unjust.

Regardless of the type of law or ruling involved, it must be changed through careful, well-planned strategies. Furthermore, the consequences of the changes must be considered.

Analyze your strategies for change and determine how many of these questions you can answer affirmatively or you have considered.

1. What is the problem? Who is affected by it? (Scope)
2. Can the rule or rules be enforced? (Practicality)
3. Will the strategy give others who are affected a chance to voice their opinions? (Consensus)
4. Will any decisions made be discussed openly for input from others not necessarily affected? (Objectivity)
5. Is anything proposed that is illegal? (Legality)
6. Will there be sufficient time for fact-finding and deliberation before trying to implement strategies? (Rationality)
7. Is there any danger of harassment or physical harm to others? (Danger)
8. If you are able to secure the change, what constructive consequences should result? What negative ones? Who will benefit from the change? (Results)

IF IT'S BROKEN...FIX IT!

Introduction: It is very easy to talk about the need for changing rules or laws. However, it is much more difficult to devise laws and rules that are rational and non-discriminatory.

Objectives: To analyze the relationship between authority and rules

To understand the balance between rights and responsibilities

To develop criteria for writing laws and rules

Grade Level: 9-12

Materials: Handout B

Procedures:

1. Distribute Handout B and copy of school policies/rules
2. Have students read policies of the hypothetical Smogville H.S.
3. Questions for discussion:
   A. What is wrong with each of the rules?
   B. Do the students seem to have any rights?
   C. Does the administration seem to have any responsibilities?
   D. What is wrong with the kind of authority being used here?
   E. Can you draw some conclusions about the need for balance between authority, rights, and responsibilities?
4. Using the discussion questions as a springboard, help students see the need for non-discriminatory, rational rules. Examples from history to illustrate points would be helpful.
5. Have students develop a criteria sheet for rules:

   Examples: Does the rule discriminate?
   Does it violate civil rights?
   Is it enforceable?
   Is there a rational reason for the rule?
   Is it understandable/comprehensible?

6. Have students form small groups of six to eight. Each group takes a different section of the school's rules and policies and applies the developed criteria to them. If some rules do not meet the criteria standards, have students re-write the rules. Have students reconvene and compare notes on each section.

SMOGVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

CODE OF BEHAVIOR

All students at Smogville High School are considered to be the wards of the Smogville Board of Education as long as said students are on school property. Therefore, it is advisable for students to accept uncomplainingly the rules and restrictions placed upon them for the purpose of character development. The content of each course offered will rest solely with the teacher, who is not bound by any restrictions imposed by others. Grading standards are also the teacher's domain. The administration is here, not to listen to student complaints, but to provide the proper punitive action in the event of infractions of rules.

STANDARDS

1. All male students will wear khaki pants, red wool sweaters, and hiking boots.

2. All female students will wear long green skirts, orange blouses, and sandals...and no makeup.

3. Handicapped or bilingual students will not be accepted in school.

4. School will begin at 6:00 a.m. and will be dismissed at 5:00 p.m. Tardiness will be punishable by a beating.

5. There will be no athletic activities or other extracurricular activities. Instead, students will work as janitors, kitchen help, etc. to maintain the school building in good condition.

6. Girls and boys will not be allowed to talk to one another in the classrooms or hallways.

7. Any students developing a proclivity for ostentation or prevarication will be excoriated on the clavicle.

8. Only male students are allowed to ask questions in class or discuss issues presented in lectures.

9. All students are expected to think only kind and pure thoughts every Wednesday afternoon.

10. Comprehensive exams will be given at the end of each semester. Any student receiving a score of less than 80% will be expelled permanently from the school.

A POTPOURRI OF ACTIVITIES

The following are activities that can be used according to need. They are designed to give students some insights into ways in which frustration and aggression are manifested, better ways of dealing with these emotions, and approaches to analyzing authority.

FRUSTRATION...AGGRESSION...STRESS

A. Puzzles -- Have students bring in mental puzzles, such as "Nervous Breakdown," "Rubik's Cube," or "Instant Insanity." Let different students work the puzzles and then discuss their feelings of frustration in trying to solve the problem. Use as a lead-in to a discussion of other frustrations in life and some of the more constructive ways of dealing with them.

B. Bulletin Board Project -- Have students collect or draw cartoons and pictures to illustrate blocked human needs. Call it "Frustration Is...."

C. Literature Project -- Select stories for students to read and discuss that involve the stress or frustration of racial or sex discrimination. Focus on how the characters reacted to their emotions and whether they responded with negative or positive behavior.

D. Interviews -- Have students interview teachers, administrators, and other school personnel, as well as others outside of the school (such as air traffic controllers, police, rescue personnel, etc.). Students should investigate the kinds of frustrations in these jobs, how the people deal with them, and what other alternative approaches might be used to handle the frustration or tensions of the jobs.

E. Song Lyrics -- Many popular songs express human needs, feelings, frustrations, and aggressive behavior. Have students bring in song lyrics to discuss. Analyze what might be better ways of handling these emotions or whether the writer uses constructive ideas.

F. History -- Select incidents from history or social studies books that represent acts of aggression - e.g., events that led to wars; incidents during the 60's civil rights movement; race riots; Jewish Holocaust; assassinations. Analyze from the standpoint of frustrated human needs and alternative approaches to violence.

G. Current Events -- Have students select items from newspapers and magazines that portray current acts of aggression, violence, or terrorism. Analyze the blocked human feelings that might have contributed to these actions. Let students prepare a display of the items, with appropriate captions, for display in the hallway for other students to observe.

H. Collage -- Have students make a collage of pictures that illustrate feelings of anger, frustration, stress, aggression, etc. Let students circulate and view others' collages. Discuss the feelings portrayed, pointing out specialized frustrations such as those of handicapped students or students from different cultures.

CONFRONTATION...AUTHORITY

A. Pictures -- Have students bring in pictures of confrontation -- e.g., police/juveniles; labor/management; child/parent; or teacher/student. Discuss constructive ways of confronting one another. Is all confrontation necessarily "bad"? What kind of guidelines can we set up for confronting an authority figure?

B. Adult Authority Figures -- Have students discuss their feelings about authority: What things about adult authority figures bother you? Why might one such person be considered a friend while another with similar responsibilities is looked on as threatening? How might we resolve problems with authority figures, and what could these people do that would ease confrontation?

C. Rules -- Have students write out the rules that bother them the most - at home and at school. What are the aspects of these rules that "bug" the students the most? Analyze with the class the reasons for the rules. What would life be like if we had no rules or laws at all? How do we change rules or laws that are unfair? Are there peaceful ways, or is violence the only answer?

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